Information research: still versus the practitioner?

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Presentation given as a keynote talk at the iFutures conference, Sheffield, 22 July 2014
The problem has been recognised for many years
It has not been uncommon for information professionals to feel that research has borne little relevance to practice, and researchers for their part have bemoaned the fact that research findings have often been ignored and consequently have had little impact.

Beaulieu, Davenport and Pors 1997
The best way to ensure that the results of library and information science research [are applied] has been debated for many years with difficulties arising, even to what should be included as 'research'

Goulding and Matthews 2002
A widely held concern in library and information science is that the relationship between research and practice, and particularly the communication of research to practice, is flawed

Haddow and Klobas 2004
Arguments about theory and practice affect many disciplines

“In theory, theory and practice are the same
In practice, they are not”
Albert Einstein
Chemistry is a discipline of two faces, one applied and the other theoretical. At one extreme are the designers [for whom] the rationale underpinning molecular synthesis is less important than the end product. At the other extreme are the chemists who seek a fundamental understanding of molecular properties.

(Ebert and Jones, Foundations of Chemistry, 2013, 15, 277)
Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought
Albert Szent-Györgyi

What is research anyway? The Hungarian biochemist sums it up cogently
There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something. You certainly usually find something, if you look, but it is not always quite the something you were after.

Thorin Oakenshield

As does Tolkien's creation, although he does not use the ‘research’ terminology
Research

A process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared

A formal definition from the UK higher education community
Process

We have to be reflective persons, to be able to do more than merely perform the mechanical functions of the Practice in order to interpret it. (Cornelius 1997)

- Replace ‘the Practice’ with ‘Research’
- Repeat

Research and practice are not so different. Ian Cornelius (University College Dublin) is a leading LIS academic
From Woods and Booth 2013 – UK survey of practitioner research; their sample of 142 papers shows a good level of activity.
38 unclassified, 17 multiple domains, 14 professional issue, 9 education
Practitioner research is certainly active, but its areas of concern differ from much academic research
Insights

There is nothing so practical as a good theory

(Kurt Lewin)

Much quoted by researchers, but not always believed by practitioners
Shared

Practitioner research in LIS journals
  – Proportion falling
  – Collaboration with academic decreasing
  – Shorter half-life
  – Cited less
  – Fewer references

Finlay, Ni, Tsou and Sugimoto 2013
Alternatives to the journal article for bringing research to the attention of practitioners. Summaries of research in magazines aimed at practitioners, and promotion of the results of Masters dissertations in practitioner journals.
Perhaps blogs are a good alternative to journal articles for dissemination to practitioners
Both sides need to reach out to the other

Academics need to understand how important the issues of practitioners are and help to design research that helps practitioners inform their own professional knowledge. Practitioners need to understand how important research is to their own practice, and work closely with academia to build a research culture within their organisations.

David McMenemy 2010
Not just research and practice; theory is different, and matters
HB Woods and A Booth
What is the current state of practitioner research? The 2013 LIRG research survey
*Library and Information Research, 2013, 17(116), 2-22*

SC Finlay, C Ni, A Tsou and CR Sugimoto
Publish or practice? An examination of librarians’ contributions to research
*portal: Libraries and the Academy, 2013, 13(4), 403-421*

Two papers which provided the data on which this presentation was based